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# A GUIDE FOR WRITING SOCIAL SCIENCE “PAPERS”

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# A GUIDE FOR WRITING SOCIAL SCIENCE "PAPERS"

By EMORY S. BOGARDUS

Department of Sociology, University of Southern California

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- I. Why write social science "papers"?
  - II. How to choose the topic.
  - III. How to make the outline.
  - IV. How to gather materials.
  - V. Suggestions concerning form.
  - VI. Suggestions regarding content.
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I. *Why write social science "papers"?* Social science "papers" are assigned for the purpose of giving the student an opportunity to develop his thinking abilities, to express his individuality, to show originality, in short, to do an independent piece of work.<sup>1</sup> A second and equally important aim is that of helping the student to acquire standard methods in writing social science "papers."

Semester or year "papers" are not assigned by instructors, as the freshman or sophomore sometimes declares, simply to make the student work,

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1. Quality is always of greater importance, of course, than quantity.

to give him an unpleasant task, or for conventional reasons. Behind the assignment is a purpose sincere and true which has in mind the student's own advancement.

II. *How to choose a topic.* In response to the frequently recurrent request: "You suggest a topic for me to write on," the instructor will usually refuse. A student who is approaching maturity—even though he has had only an introduction of a few weeks to social science—must have given a little thought from time to time to a few, at least, of the pressing social issues of the day. If the instructor chooses a topic for a student whom he only recently has met, it may be a question entirely outside of the range of that person's interests; if the student makes the choice, carefully guarding himself against selecting one that appeals merely to his passing fancy, he will have a problem for investigation that lies within the boundaries of his past thinking, and hence one upon which he will be able, probably, to do his best work. Furthermore, he will have relied upon and exercised his own mentality, rather than have leaned upon the aid of another.

The student, hence, should search his own mind for suitable themes, with the aid of such hints as he may gather for himself from the class discussions, the introductory lectures in the course of study, and the text-book and collateral books in the

field in which the "paper" has been assigned. Such an exercise will suggest many problems that will challenge the student's attention, intellectual curiosity, and interests. If three or more of these questions are accurately worded and written out in topical form, the student will have mastered the first step in attaining skill in the social science field. The mere formulating in words and on paper of such topics invariably results in progress.

With the student's list of carefully framed topics before him, the work of the instructor begins. The teacher will point out which of the suggested problems will be best for the student to work upon, or he may suggest changes in the phraseology of some one of the themes which will make it practicable.

There are three main classes of problems for "papers": (1) library subjects; (2) field subjects; and (3) theoretical subjects,—these are not different types, but various stages on an ascending scale of difficulty and importance. (1) For a beginner, the library topic is the most logical; the material is usually near at hand and easy to obtain. The best data are to be found in a few books and magazines; and the time of the student is conserved, because within a few steps of the study table in the library is the full equipment. In general, before one should think of doing field work, he must acquaint himself with the written studies on the particular problem, with the back-

grounds of the problem, and with the technique for undertaking first-hand investigations. Towards this goal, library subjects lead.

(2) Field work calls for maturity of judgment and poise in meeting persons of experience. Employers and employees, landlords and tenants, natives and aliens must be met and disarmed of suspicion, and given favorable impressions, or the inquiry will fail. A large range of secondary but vital issues continually arises which must be met with despatch. The persons under investigation, or who are the guardians of facts which are under examination, are often offended by a single naïve question or remark by the well-intentioned but unsophisticated inquirer; as a result, the investigation comes to naught and an unwholesome impression is given of social science.

Field subjects should be chosen only by persons who are versatile in methods, who have plenty of time, or who have special credentials or entrée,—that is to say, who have willing friends or relatives who are or have been employed in the proposed field of study, or who themselves are or have been so engaged. Not until the post-graduate year, or in exceptional cases, the senior year, should one contemplate field work. Through the exercise of a trained judgment and of long and patient seeking for and verification of data, new facts will be discovered, old theories disproved, and new ones established.

(3) The analysis of advanced theoretical topics in social science requires a thorough preparation in the study of the direct and the foundational literature, a knowledge of first-hand facts, an acquaintance with every-day personal and institutional life, and a sympathetic touch with the feelings, thoughts, and volitions of the common people. Such studies call for thought involving analysis, criticism, and synthesis. Only minds with trained, fertile, and original characteristics should enter here. The findings occasionally lead to improvements in social procedure. This type of investigation, like field work, often produces results that are worthy of publication in the social science journals.

The novice then should choose a library topic, but in so doing he will be prone to select one of too general and too broad a nature. Consequently, the materials are illimitable and bewilderingly complex; the student is swamped. He becomes discouraged, loses himself in the mass of details, or merely skims the surface and produces a superficial "paper." "Child Welfare" is a theme which is too extensive; "Child Welfare in the United States" is likewise too far-reaching. These and other comprehensive subjects may be modified and narrowed satisfactorily in scope. "The Effects of Child Labor," "The Causes of Juvenile Delinquency," "The George Junior Republic Idea," or "The Social Advantages of Rural

Life" will serve as illustrations of practicable topics for "papers."

Later, when the student has reached his post-graduate year, for example, he may seek to determine the causes of delinquency among 100 boys who have appeared in the local juvenile court (field subject), or still later, he may work out an educational theory for decreasing juvenile delinquency (theoretical subject).

III. *How to make an outline.* "I always write my paper first and the outline last," said a college student recently, with an evident degree of pride. But such a method is not to be encouraged. It indicates, perhaps, the work of a genius; or, more likely, of an unharnessed, slatternly mind.

After the topic has been determined upon, the pupil should force himself—at first, it will be an effort—to inventory his own mind upon the subject which has been chosen; if it is one in which he has been interested for some time, the number of ideas that he has unconsciously, inchoately accumulated upon the question, will upon examination prove to be amazing. These miscellaneous thoughts should be arranged in some kind of order; the resultant outline will be preliminary, unsatisfactory, and subject to change, but will more than repay the effort.

The next step is that of reading and of asking questions on the problem. Then, the outline should

be revised; changes and improvements will occur. It is surprising how often the mere mechanical copying of an outline, if one does it thoughtfully, will start the processes of thought to work and materialize in valuable modifications.

No outline is ever more than tentative; when it is drawn up finally and the "paper" is written according to its plan, it will likely prove, even then, inadequate. The outline is an instrument of relative value,—moving presumably from improvement to improvement. It serves the purposes of an organized survey at each step of one's thinking on the problem in mind; it represents at each stage in its development the best plan of attack.

The interactions between the outline and one's materials on a question are continual and progressive: to make or reconstruct the outline suggests new ideas for the text of the "paper"; to write sections of the text gives rise to novel and improved changes in the outline. It is this give-and-take between outline and content that spells progress. The outline is never completed; it is never an end in itself; it is always "in process," a means, a tool for stimulating organization and invention, and an instrument for making progress in writing.

*IV. How to gather materials.* The present writer, after experimenting in several directions, has found that a duplex system for gathering ma-

terials works best. Such a system involves (a) cards, preferably 3 x 5 inches in size, and (b) a loose-leaf note-book carrying paper of letter size (8½ x 11 inches). Cards of one color are used for collecting bibliographic references; cards of another color are useful for noting ideas and suggestions that come to one miscellaneous and which call for small space. The bibliographic references should be written in a uniform style. References to books and documents may be made in the following order: Author's name, his initials, title of book underscored, publisher's name, place and date of publication, chapters or pages of the related material. If the reference is to an article, the order may be the following: Author's name, his initials, title of article in quotation marks, name of magazine abbreviated and underscored, volume of magazine and pages of the article. If the magazine is current, or unbound, reference to it should be made by date and pages. (Illustrations of the three types of references are given in footnotes two, three, and four. Careful attention should be given to accuracy and uniformity in punctuation.)

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2. Ely, R. T., *Outlines of Economics*, (Macmillan: New York), 1917, Chs. III., IV., (or pp. 33-60).
  3. Blackmar, F. W., "Leadership in Social Reform," *Amer. Jour. of Sociology*, XVI: 626-33.
  4. Howard, G. E., "Alcohol and Crime: A Study in Social Causation," *Amer. Jour. of Sociology*, July, 1918, pp. 61-80.

The bibliographic cards should be kept in an alphabetical order; and from them, the final bibliography can be made with a minimum of effort. The other cards should be arranged according to the main headings of the outline; thus, related materials will be thrown together. The loose-leaf note-book will serve for making extensive digests, for copying long excerpts, for keeping "clippings" in pasted form, and for use in writing the various drafts of the "paper," section by section; it should be provided with indexes (these may be hand-made) for subdividing the divisions of the "paper" according to the plan of the outline.

Cards are by all means advisable in making bibliographies; they are of convenient size; they can be handled with ease; they can be kept according to an alphabetical arrangement. But they are too small for copying voluminous data. Similarly, the note-book paper is too large—and wasteful—when the bibliography is being made or when single and isolated facts are being noted. In the long run, the duplex system is more satisfactory than either the cards or the paper of letter size alone.

The making of the bibliography is very important; it bears on its face the tell-tale degree to which the author has been careless, or thorough. A successfully made bibliography calls for patient, skillful, and consistent effort; it is a worth-while achievement to bring together the leading refer-

ences to everything of value that have appeared in print on a subject; it gives the original thinker a prominent camping ground from which to climb to hitherto unexplored regions of thought.

The first place in which to search for bibliographic data is in the card catalogues of the libraries,—college, city, and special; these will give access to books and documents. The second store-house that has been prepared in order to simplify the work of the student in any field is the series of volumes known as the *Reader's Guide*, (for articles that were published several years ago, see *Poole's Index*). A library assistant will explain to the uninitiated the use of these convenient reference series.

Often the inquirer will find himself swamped by the large number of references to articles in the *Reader's Guide*, upon his topic; but he can soon acquire facility in detecting the metal-laden ores. He should center attention upon those articles which have been printed in the standard social science journals, such as: the *American Journal of Sociology*, the *Economic Journal*, the *American Historical Review*, the *Political Science Quarterly*, the *International Journal of Ethics*, the *American Journal of Theology*—the list is long. The student can obtain the rating of a journal by inquiring of his instructor; and his own experience in the use of journals will develop his ability to judge of values. Judicious use should be made of that

class of magazines which are semi-scientific and semi-popular, such as: the *North American Review*, the *World's Work*, the *Outlook*, the *Independent*. The student of elementary applied sociology will find the *Survey* to be his most useful mine of current information. Articles of one or two pages in length only, articles of any length in the newspapers and the popular weeklies, unsigned articles and editorials should be treated with caution and careful scrutiny.<sup>5</sup>

As the student proceeds in making reading acquaintances, he should note and examine articles by the standard authorities, in the various social science fields. For example, in sociology proper, articles bearing the signatures of Giddings, Small, Ross, Howard, Blackmar, Cooley, Ellwood, Dealey, Gillette, Hayes, or others of similar high standing, will instantly command attention. Other names will come to signify peculiar biases or unreliability. The student must learn to digest well and at all times the writings of others, even of authorities. He must never accept ideas uncritically.

V. *Suggestions concerning form.* The final draft of the "paper" should be submitted to the instructor in legible hand-writing or in typewriting with margins of at least one and one-quarter

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5. Occasionally, however, a brief, unsigned article or editorial of a page or less in length will contain a new idea of first magnitude; length is not necessarily a criterion of quality.

inches at the top and on the left-hand side, and of one-half inch at the bottom of the pages. Preferably the paper should be of letter size (8½ x 11 inches). It is not necessary to have the study typewritten; legible hand-writing in ink, done neatly, with uniformity, and without hurry, will meet ordinary requirements. Only one side of the paper should be written upon. Typewritten material should be "double-spaced," except where several lines are quoted, when "single spacing" becomes the rule. A substantial quality of paper should always be chosen.

The title-page should give the title (capitalized) of the "paper," the name and number of the course for which the "paper" is written, the name of the institution and the date of finishing the work, in a well-balanced form, as follows:

## THE SOCIAL ADVANTAGES OF RURAL LIFE

By John Jones

Written for Sociology 118 (Rural Sociology)

University of Southern California

Instructor, H. J. McClean

May 10, 1917

The table of contents should follow the title page; for a "paper" of 2500 words, it should not cover more than two or three pages. It should state the main headings and two or more sub-headings under each of the major points. A form for a table of contents for the topic: "The Social

**Advantages of Rural Life,"** is presented here-with; variations should be made freely.

## CONTENTS

- (1) Introduction
  - (a) Reasons for choosing the topic
  - (b) Scope of the field
- (2) Advantages of Outdoor Living
  - (a) Physical health conserved
  - (b) Nerves remain unjaded
- (3) Advantages of Rural Family Life
  - (a) Unified home life
  - (b) Sane training for children
- (4) Influences on Development of Personality
  - (a) Freedom from social conventions
  - (b) Opportunities for leadership
- (5) Conclusions

In writing the "paper," each leading section should be introduced by its proper heading—according to the outline—and be separated by at least an inch of space from the end of the preceding main divisions. If the student were preparing a thesis,—introductory or elementary "papers" in social science are hardly worthy of the title of "thesis"—it would be well to begin each major section at the top of the first right-hand page following the end of the preceding section,

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6. The present writer has received "papers" in which the table of contents extended over six pages and the main text, ten pages; such a proportion must be avoided.

and to give also the sub-headings in their proper places.

Special effort should be made to give credit to the authorities that are quoted or cited. Whenever the conclusions of some authority are quoted or facts from some special piece of research are used, a small Arabic numeral should be placed at the end of the quotation or citation, slightly elevated, and repeated at the foot of the page—see the illustrations in this printed set of directions, or in any of the social science journals and books. The footnote should be set off from the text above it, either by an extra space or by a heavy line. As a rule, the footnote explanation should give the name of the authority who is quoted or cited, the title of the book, underscored (or of the article, and of the magazine, abbreviated and underscored), and the pages. If the name of the authority is mentioned in the text of the “paper,” it need not be repeated in the footnote. If reference is made a second or third time to a particular book or article in immediate succession, the abbreviation, *ibid.*, underscored, together with the numbers of the new pages, should appear; it is not necessary to repeat the whole reference in the footnote. Explanations and rules similar to those given in the foregoing lines should be learned by the student; he should consult the footnote forms used in standard works, such as Ely’s *Outlines of Economics*, or Blackmar and Gillin’s *Outlines of*

*Sociology.* Further assistance can be had by consulting frequently such an invaluable guide-book as *A Manual for Writers.*<sup>7</sup>

A constant aim should be to attain accuracy in punctuation, in spelling, in syllabication, in paragraphing, and in choice of words. No pains should be spared to settle all doubtful points by consulting *A Manual for Writers*, referred to in the preceding paragraph (or a similar book), a book of synonyms, or a dictionary.

The bibliography should be given at the close of the "paper," arranged according to the surnames of the authors in alphabetical order. The general sequence in the "paper" should be:

1. Title Page
2. Table of Contents
3. Text of the "Paper"
4. Bibliography

The manuscript should be enclosed in an appropriate cardboard cover, bearing the name of the student, the title of the course of study, and the name of the instructor.

VI. *Suggestions concerning the content.* In beginning the final draft, it is wise to have a quiet place in which to work,—where no one will interrupt. The mind cannot do its best and most original work beset by the constant hum of conversation, or by the disturbing activities of others.

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7. By Manly and Powell, The University of Chicago Press, 1917.

The brain produces its best work when least likely to be disturbed. Only work such as copying or attending to relatively unessential details should be undertaken in an environment of noise and interruptions.

Before the final writing is begun, it is well to have the work in such a shape that it can be laid aside and practically forgotten for two or more weeks. When it is taken up after the interim the mind will bring to it a surprising degree of fresh criticism; unsuspected errors will be recognized, and new points will occur to the student. Further, this precaution protects one against growing "stale" on the subject.

The introductory paragraphs should be brief. The writer should not allow himself to ramble on at length at the start; he should state concisely in brisk sentences, the points that are necessary for an understanding of the material that is to follow. Nothing bores or prejudices a reader like a drawn-out introduction.

Throughout, "padding" should be studiously shunned. A straight-forward, natural, progressive style should be developed. Variety in choice of words should be cultivated; the use of flowery language should be avoided. Pride should be taken in developing a clear, effective style, in introducing new words, similes and other figures of speech, providing the variations are natural and fitting. No hesitation should ever be shown in re-writing

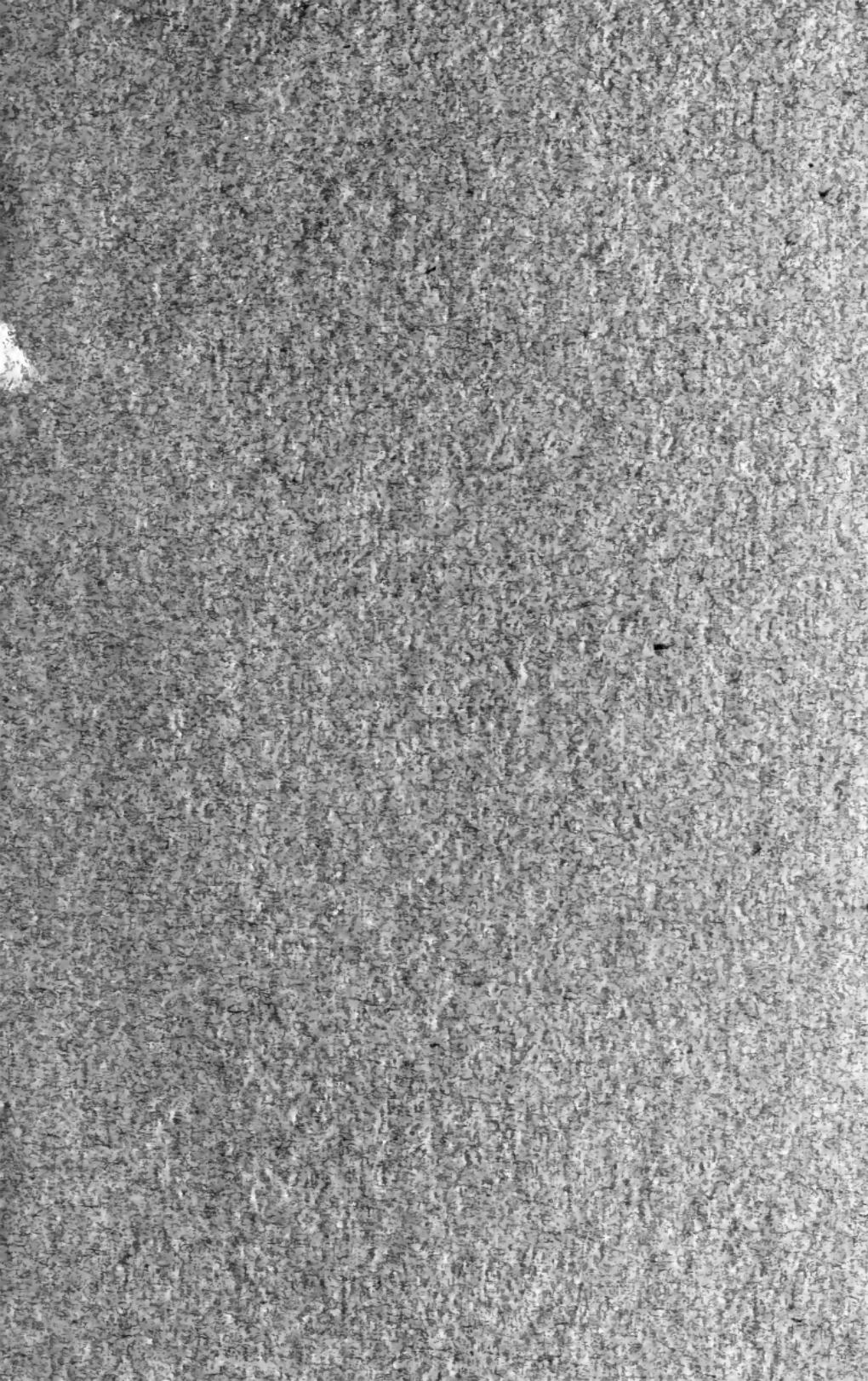
several times particularly difficult paragraphs; improvement will probably accompany each revision. Sometimes one's best ideas arise only when he is engaged in actual writing.

A high degree of satisfaction comes from original work. The average student is not simply an imitator; he is a potential, if not an actual "inventor." It is not necessary for him continually to bemoan the fate that he is not a "born-genius." He is not obliged to live in other people's minds. Originality, invention, creation should be his goal. The student should never be satisfied with doing merely *good* work; nothing less than his best should satisfy him, and that only temporarily, for what is his best today may be his second-class work tomorrow. His possibilities in the direction of originality, he may have never surmised.

The text of the "paper" should build fact upon fact in as logical order as possible. The truth must never be strained for the sake of effect. In general, a climactic order should be established; at least those climaxes should be built up which are inherent in the natural sequence of facts. Whenever the writer feels reasonably sure of his ground, he should criticise his materials, favorably and unfavorably; at every turn, he should become master of his data.

The closing paragraphs may include a brief summary of the territory that has been covered.

Here the writer's final conclusions—in one, two, three order, if he wishes—may be added. At this point, occurs the writer's supreme opportunity for manifesting his ability. An ultimate goal of every writer of social science "papers" should be to produce a piece of work worthy of publishing, of putting into permanent form of print, of giving to the world.



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